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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Kol Israel quoted a senior U.S. Government official in Washington as saying that the Palestinian Authority must immediately begin to impose its authority in the Gaza Strip, and that implementation of the road map cannot even begin unless this precondition is fulfilled. The source said the acts of violence in the Gaza Strip are sabotaging the efforts of the administration to promote the move towards peace. Earlier the White House spokesman said President Bush, at his meeting with Abu Mazen, would demand that the Palestinian Authority chairman impose law and order in the Gaza Strip.

All media quoted PM Sharon's vehement denial yesterday of rumors that Israel was planning additional unilateral steps similar to the Gaza disengagement. Speaking at the Annual Israel Management Conference, PM Sharon said: "Yesterday there was a rumor, as a result of baseless remarks...I am telling you here, Israel is not about to examine any other plans. We have only one plan, the road map, which the U.S. backs, and I see no change in its position, and that is the only plan that exists." On the same subject, Ha'aretz and Kol Israel reported on the meeting yesterday between the PM and Ambassador Jones, in which the PM presented this position of rejecting further unilateral moves and adhering to the road map.

Jerusalem Post reports that Kim Howells, Britain's Minister of State for the Middle East, praised Israel's response to the firing of Kassam from Gaza and hinted that financial aid to the PA might be withheld if the PA did not seriously begin tackling the terrorism in its midst.

Ha'aretz quoted PA Leader Mahmoud Abbas as saying yesterday that the IDF is jeopardizing any chance of peace, and condemning the ongoing IDF offensive against Palestinian militants in the West Bank and Gaza.

Israel Radio reported this morning that two Al-Aqsa Martyrs brigades activists were killed in the Balata refugee camp in Nablus following an exchange of fire with an IDF paratrooper force that came to apprehend fugitives. Eleven fugitives were arrested. Ala Danakra, a leader of the wanted El-Aksa Martyrs Brigade in Balata, warned that his men would respond to the killing of two of their comrades, saying that the "Tahadiya" - the temporary ceasefire - had ceased to exist. Yediot Aharonot reports that following intelligence information, there is an high alert in the IDF, out of a fear that the Hamas will try kidnapping an IDF soldier.

Ha'aretz report that former Pentagon employee Larry

Franklin has struck a deal with prosecutors and plan to plead guilty next week to a number of charges against him. He will also testify against former AIPAC officials suspected of passing on information they received from him to a number of Israeli Embassy employees and journalists.

Kol Israel reported this morning that the Fatah organization won in yesterday PA elections with more than sixty percent of the votes in the third round of the local authority elections in the West Bank. The Palestinians say Israel did not try to disrupt the elections in the areas under its control, even though Hamas was taking part.

All media focused on the decision by Attorney General Meni Mzuz to re-open a probe into October 2000 riots, which left 13 Israeli-Arab citizens dead. The Ministry of Justice is considering the option of exhuming the bodies, even if the families oppose the move. A/G Mazuz is quoted as saying that "if we erred, we will correct it."

Yediot Aharonot reported that Jordan's Ambassador to Israel Maaruf Suleiman el Bahith confirmed yesterday that King Abdullah of Jordan will soon visit Israel and the PA.

Mideast

Summary:

Military correspondent Alex Fishman opined in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot that: "Israel's pullout from Gaza gives it legitimization to expand the intensity and variety of the military responses to infringement of its sovereignty. The window that the Americans are giving us is a function of catastrophe. Until a catastrophe occurs-Israel can continue."

Military correspondent Amos Harel wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The military reaction in Gaza helped Sharon's standing in the Likud vote.. Yet, in both cases, success will be hard to preserve in the long run.. The question is, when will the IDF attacks boomerang because, instead of turning the Gaza public against HAMAS, they bolster hostility toward Israel."

Political analyst Yoel Marcus wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "To reach the April primaries safely, if indeed they are held on time, Sharon will have to form an internal coalition in his party. He will have to pledge his adherence to the political arrangement and, speaking in a closed forum, he indeed pledged not to deviate from his political plan and execute it according to the road map."

Block Quotes:

I. Military correspondent Alex Fishman opined in Yediot Aharonot: "The interest at the heart of the US policy in the region is: to safeguard Arik Sharon. Associates of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice were even disappointed by Sharon's achievement in the Likud Central Committee. From their standpoint, it would have been preferable for him to fail and establish a new centrist party, which would make order in the Israeli political establishment. The polls carried out by the US embassy in Israel regarding Sharon's political situation strengthened their sense that he is the best investment they have in the region. Ostensibly, the Americans are demonstrating a great deal of activity in the Gaza Strip. For example, they are now looking for a replacement for the security coordinator to the Palestinian security services-General Ward, who is returning to command the US Central Command (CENTCOM) in Europe. There is also extensive activity surrounding the economic envoy to the PA James Wolfensohn, who is threatening to leave his position, since he feels he has done all he can as fundraiser for the Palestinians. The job is too small for him. He wants to enter the emerging history of the region in a more central role, and he needs to be placated.... As far as the Americans are concerned, Israel's pullout from Gaza gives it legitimization to expand the intensity and variety of the military responses to infringement of its sovereignty. The window that the Americans are giving us is a function of catastrophe. Until a catastrophe occurs-Israel can continue."

II. " Military correspondent Amos Harel wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Ari'el Sharon's week ended better than it started on both the political and the security fronts....and the two fronts are closely connected. as the military reaction in Gaza helped Sharon's standing in the Likud vote.... Yet, in both cases, success will be hard to preserve in the long run because they do not resolve the basic paradoxes in which Sharon performs.... On the Palestinian ring, Israel is currently taking steps to remove HAMAS from the PA political game, knowing that if it succeeds, it will be forcing the organization to resume its terrorist war against it.... Presently, the strong-arm policy in the Gaza Strip provides Sharon and Defense Minister Mofaz with political gains., but if the skirmishes should continue, Israel will apparently be facing a problem.. The question is, when will the IDF attacks boomerang because, instead of turning the Gaza public against HAMAS, they bolster hostility toward Israel.... The scenario where an escalation of the struggle against the organization would make it lay down its guns sounds too far-fetched, at least for the moment. and international understanding and sympathy could vanish in an instant."

III. " Political analyst Yoel Marcus wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "PM Sharon won the Likud Central Committee vote, but the truth is that he did not win the war, but only one battle.. His future rule is still hanging on a thread. with the budget vote that might advance the elections and the Likud primaries in April, where he needs his party to elect him candidate for prime minister.. He must work with his head, not his gut. and first mend the rifts and win the next primaries on the ticket of forsaking the Greater Israel dream... To reach the April primaries safely, if indeed they are held on time, Sharon will have to form an internal coalition in his party. He will have to pledge his adherence to the political arrangement and, speaking in a closed forum, he indeed pledged not to deviate from his political plan and execute it according to the road map, provided the Palestinians do their share.. Revenge against those who played their tricks on him can wait. It is always better served cold."

JONES